

provided emergency response training to first responders in all fifty States and territories, as well as Federal Government employees, foreign officials, and private entities. The Center is especially well-known internationally for its weapons of mass destruction training facility.

The Center often receives offers of donated goods and services, such as training displays, response equipment, and trailers. These donations would allow the Center to offer stronger training opportunities at a lower cost to the Department of Homeland Security, DHS, and the American taxpayer. Regrettably, the Center does not have the legal authority to accept gifts that would enhance its ability to deliver superior training.

H.R. 3978 would amend the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 to permit the Center to receive donated gifts and services that are related to preparedness for and response to terrorism. The legislation further calls on the Secretary of Homeland Security to annually report to Congress on gifts accepted and how such gifts contribute to the mission of the Center.

Other DHS training centers, such as the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, already have the authority to accept gifts and donations. It is only appropriate that the Center also have this authority.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3978 is a straight-forward piece of legislation that will pay immediate dividends for our first responder community. I support its passage and encourage my colleagues to support it as well.

THE LOSS OF JACK PEEL

HON. KATHY CASTOR

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 16, 2009

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise today in honor of a brave American veteran and a great Floridian, Jack Peel, who passed away on November 29, 2009.

Mr. Peel was a native Floridian, born in Chipley, and a graduate of Chipley High School. He served his country for four years in the Navy where he made lifelong friends with his fellow sailors. He then joined the Air Force where he remained for the next 26 years and retired as master sergeant.

After retirement from the military, Mr. Peel and his beloved wife Lynette made their home in Bay Crest Park in Hillsborough County, Tampa. There he dedicated his time to public service. He served as president of the Bay Crest Park Civic Association, an active member of the Town N Country Alliance, a Catholic Church community volunteer and advocate. Jack Peel had a talent for persuading his neighbors, policymakers, and the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners to beautify and enhance Bay Crest and Town N Country. He and Lynette and the outstanding Town N Country community activists worked diligently to improve our community. For his dedication to service, the Civic Association completed Peel Park in December 2009 in honor of Mr. Peel.

Madam Speaker, Jack Peel will be greatly missed. For all who love our community, be inspired by Jack Peel's dedication and service.

BUENOS AIRES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

HON. RAÚL M. GRIJALVA

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 16, 2009

Mr. GRIJALVA. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to all the staff at the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge consists of a beautiful 118,000 acres of mountains, riparian zones, and grasslands in the Southern Arizona desert and contains majestic areas such as Brown Canyon, Arivaca Cienega and the Baboquivari Mountains.

The Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge is a sanctuary for many different types of wildlife including the Pima pineapple cactus, the pygmy-owl and the endangered masked bobwhite quail. Additionally, 325 bird species, 53 species of reptiles and amphibians, 58 mammal species, including mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, javelina, and mountain lions all call the Refuge home. Without the protection of the Refuge, many of these species would disappear and be lost to us forever. The Refuge is also a vital part of the community and offers guided tours, hiking, camping, horseback riding, mountain biking, excellent birding, and plenty of beautiful picnic areas. The Refuge even offers wonderful educational opportunities through volunteer projects and nature workshops.

The men and women employed at the Refuge work tirelessly to preserve this beautiful area. Through their efforts, the Refuge has successfully reintroduced the endangered bobwhite quail and the pronghorn deer into the wild and ensures their continued protection. These people are truly the guardians of an environmental treasure and view their task as a privilege, not just a job.

In addition to the wonderful staff at the Refuge, an exemplary group of volunteers known as the Friends of the Buenos Aires National Refuge dedicate their time to the community education conservation, and preservation of this wonderful land. This nonprofit group gives selflessly to promote the goals of the Refuge and with the help of the Refuge staff; they recently held the 1st Annual Grasslands Fair to celebrate this beloved land.

The Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, its staff, and the volunteers who dedicate their time are all truly valued players in the protection of America's wild lands. Being a member of the House Committee on Natural Resources and having seen our community grow to over a million people, during my lifetime, I know the importance of protecting areas like the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. It gives me great joy to see such wonderful people giving of themselves to preserve and protect this spectacular region of southern Arizona.

A PROCLAMATION HONORING MICHELE MANISKAS FOR HER CERTIFICATION BY THE NA- TIONAL BOARD FOR PROFES- SIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS

HON. ZACHARY T. SPACE

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 16, 2009

Mr. SPACE. Madam Speaker,

Whereas, Michele Maniskas has been granted certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; and

Whereas, Michele Maniskas has sufficiently demonstrated adherence and dedication to the five core propositions of teaching set by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; and

Whereas, due to her hard work and dedication to her profession, Michele Maniskas was able to achieve this esteemed honor; and

Whereas, we recognize the values and lessons teachers impart to our children; and

Whereas, the creative ingenuity that Michele Maniskas has demonstrated while educating her students; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that along with Ohio's 18th Congressional District, I congratulate Michele Maniskas for her certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

AUTHORITY TO CONVERT CERTAIN OVERSEAS LIMITED APPOINT- MENTS TO PERMANENT AP- POINTMENTS

SPEECH OF

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1517, a bipartisan bill authored by Representative ENGEL and the ranking member on the Committee of Homeland Security, Representative KING.

As chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, I am grateful to these members for putting before us today a bill that aims to fix a discrete but important issue at Customs and Border Protection.

In short, this bill gives the Commissioner the authority to noncompetitively convert approximately 35 overseas CBP employees into full-time permanent civil service positions.

These employees were originally hired by the Immigration and Naturalization Service under "limited overseas appointment" authority between 1987 and 2003.

Over time, the nature of their work changed, but their employment designation did not.

Since 2005, CBP, the Office of Personnel Management and the Department of State have been trying to fix the glitch, but realize they need the help of Congress.

Doing so will not only ensure that the employees continue to receive the appropriate benefits, but will also provide them with the protections they deserve as dedicated employees serving the CBP mission abroad.

Further, this conversion of employment status will ensure that CBP and the United States honor agreements between our country and our foreign counterparts, such as Ireland, governing U.S. personnel overseas.

Going forward, using the authorities provided to the Commissioner in H.R. 1517, it is my hope that the Commissioner will take the histories of these dedicated 35 individuals into account when applying CBP's rotation policy.

In our attempt to "right the system," CBP should not unduly disrupt the lives of these dedicated individuals, who provide a valuable service to this country.